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PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Baseball Fan Living His Dream as General Counsel for Pirates

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 GC Mid-Atlantic
 07-16-2007



More than four out of five U.S. workers are not working at their dream jobs, according to a survey released earlier this year by CareerBuilder.com. But while many of us trudge through the day in a zombie-like state waiting for 5 p.m. to roll around, Larry Silverman is living his dream.

Silverman has been a Pittsburgh Pirates fan all his life and is now working for the baseball team he grew up rooting for.

"It's a very challenging and stimulating job," said Silverman, vice president and general counsel for the team since February 2002. "But I'm having a lot of fun."

Silverman has been associated with the club for a few years before he was officially hired. In 1993, while working for Dickie McCamey & Chilcote, the Pirates became a client of the firm. The organization never had an in-house general counsel and relied on outside counsel instead.

Silverman was assigned to work with the club, primarily to handle their salary arbitration cases. Over the years, he began doing additional work for the baseball operations department, such as assisting the team in contract negotiations.

In 2001, David Littlefield became the general manager of the club. Littlefield came from an organization that had a lawyer assist the general manager on all aspects of baseball operations. He wanted the same thing for the Pirates and because he was impressed with the work Silverman had been doing, offered him a front office job.

"I accepted it pretty quickly," said Silverman with a laugh. "I loved what I was doing at the law firm, but he offered me a very cool job and I took it. In fact, I said yes before I even knew how much I would be paid."

Silverman's role and responsibilities as general counsel for the team are divided into two parts. On the baseball side, he works directly with Littlefield, assisting him on all contract negotiations with current players and free agents. He also assists him with any questions that come up in the interpretation of the collective bargaining agreement, the drug policy, the recent George Mitchell investigation and any other matter that involves the baseball operations. He also assists Littlefield in making sure the team's payroll is within the parameters set by ownership.

"It's a lot of fun, particularly when you have the opportunity to be around the GM and assist him and the other baseball guys, listening to baseball talk," he said. "My input is to not ask questions about somebody's slider, but because the monetary aspects are important, I'm in the mix of the decision-making."



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In addition to these duties, Silverman has general counsel responsibilities for the rest of the organization. He works directly with all departments by reviewing sponsorship agreements, and construction and vendor contracts. He also works on payroll management, employment-related matters with the team's director of human resources and handles intellectual property matters related to the club's brand and logo and a whole range of legal issues that come up in the organization.

"I view my job as a problem solver," he said. "People come to me many times a day and while the questions are sometimes complicated, it often comes down to 'can I do this?' or 'what do I have to do to be able to do this?' or 'what needs changed in order for me to do this?' I try to help them solve that problem."

Whenever it is possible, Silverman will try to come up with a creative, legal way to solve the problem.

"That's how I view my role here and hopefully others don't see me as impediment of what they want to do, but they'll come to me thinking, 'Larry will find a way to make it work,'" he said. "And usually I am able to."

One of Silverman's most important jobs for the team is to help the general manager manage the club's payroll by keeping strict control over the salary arbitration and free agent process with the goal that the club be both fiscally responsible and able to field a competitive team.

"Obviously in a small market like ours that's a bigger challenge than in a larger market where they might not have to be as attuned to payroll issues as you are here," said Silverman.

"I think that the club is getting there," he continued. "We have a young and talented team. Under the collective bargaining system, we have control over our players for six years. Since nearly all of our core players have less than six years service time, they will not be free agents for a while. But the proof is going to be in the pudding. We're going to have to start winning but I'm confident that we will."

As the only in-house attorney at the club, Silverman only has one law clerk on his staff to assist him. But he doesn't mind getting his hands dirty.

"I don't mind doing the grunt work," he said. "There are no projects that I consider to be beneath me. If I don't have the help at that time or if it's something I think I need to do myself, I do it."

On the baseball operations side, there are several operations assistants who help him at times, such as pulling any statistical information that are needed for preparing a salary-arbitration case.

If there are ever issues that are just too big to handle or he doesn't know the answer to, that's when he will turn to outside counsel.

The range of issues that he has to deal with includes first amendment issues with people who want to protest outside the ballpark; challenging intellectual issues; and difficult employee-related matters. On the baseball side, they have some difficult issues revolving around the interpretation of the collective bargaining agreement.

"I find just about every issue to be very challenging in one way or another," he said.

On the nonbaseball side of the operations, because the club has 180 employees, he deals with a variety of employment-related issues, such as potential discrimination claims, issues dealing with workers compensation and health benefits, the fair standards labor act, intellectual property issues, and issues dealing with the interpretation of various directives from Major League Baseball (MLB).

"The sport of Major League Baseball is somewhat unique," said Silverman. "I call it the mother ship in New York. So much of what we do on the individual club level derive from directives from MLB -- whether it's the drug policy or directives dealing with our mark. So there's a lot of interaction with MLB lawyers on both the labor issues and on general corporate issues."

Silverman hopes to be in his career for a long time.

"One of my most proud professional accomplishments is this job," he said. "It really is my dream job."

But there's still one accomplishment that he has his sights on.

"I want to help this team win a championship," he said. "While I cannot play on the field, I can help the general manager put together a team that will compete and hopefully win a championship. That would be a great feeling."

Daniel Casciato is a Pittsburgh-based writer who has authored articles on business, finance and law for consumer and trade publications.

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